

“Fake Christianity: Meism”

1 Corinthians 10:23-24

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<https://www.sermonspice.com/product/592/its-all-about-me>

News flash!!!! It's not all about you!!!! Church is about God and yet a sense of entitlement has crept into churches.

We live in a time where people feel extremely entitled. Entitlement is that feeling that you deserve, yes you deserve things, it's your right. In society we see where big 'ol #1---self takes priority.

We trample others feeling because, “I have a right to say how I feel.”

We treat others badly because, “I deserve to do what *I* want to do even if it means hurting people. If other people don't have things...well that's their problem.”

We talk in a way that seems to indicate it's about me, it's all about how I want things, it's all about my feelings.

In our series on Fake Christianity we are looking at “isms.” We began the series with Church-ism. Last week was Consumer-ism. And I've just got to say what about the message and the preaching of Chris Steurnagel. Xxxxxx Next week we will conclude the series with Fake Christianity: Practical Atheism.

But today I'm going to continue to build a bit on Chris's message of Consumerism and talk about Me-ism.

Scripture is clear that it's not always about us. **1 Corinthians 10²⁴ Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.** To be concerned about the good of others we have to get self out of the way. It is hard when we arrive at church to turn off the selfish button.

Advertising and commercial impact us. I'm pretty sure you can finish this commercial jingle: “You deserve a break today, so get up and get away _____ (to McDonalds)! That slogan has been since the '70's and McDonalds' just changed it about 4 years ago.

Oh, we deserve it. Deserve to go get convenient, ‘healthy,’ drive thru food. Yep—deserve it. It's about me.

Another restaurant chain, Burger King, changed their ad not too long ago. For years Burger King said, xxxx “Have It Your Way.” “Hold the pickles, hold the lettuce, special orders don't upset us, all we ask is that you let us serve it your way. Have it your way!”

(Burger King sign) Have it your way. You have the right to have what you want, exactly when you want it. Because on the menu of life, you are “Today's Special.” And tomorrow. And the day after that. And ...well, you get the drift. Yes, that's right. We maybe the King, but you my friend are the almighty ruler.” Wow. A sense of entitlement.

But Jesus said, **Luke 9:23 New Living Translation (NLT)** ²³ **Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me.**

You see, dying to self is an ongoing theme in scripture. In fact, dying to self is not really an option for a Christian. If you want to follow Jesus...you must give up your own way.

Galatians 2:20 Contemporary English Version (CEV) ²⁰ **I have died, but Christ lives in me. And I now live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me.**

Have we died to self? Are we living for Christ, or is it all about me?

Francis Chan is a current author, pastor and preacher. This has been attributed to him. **(image)** (Random church goer: “I didn’t really like the worship today.” Francis Chan: “That’ okay, we weren’t worshipping you.”

Philippians 2:3-4 Common English Bible (CEB) ³ **Don’t do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves.** ⁴ **Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others.**

What is it that others need? Let’s take the Meism out of church. Take the Meism out your daily life. There may be a sense of unwillingness because of position, finances, career, how long you’ve been a member, but it may be helpful to hear what has been attributed to Billy Graham, “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.”

A clergy friend of mine is the Rev. Dr. Vance Rains. He was long time Campus Minister for Florida State University at the Wesley Foundation. He is currently Senior Pastor at First United Methodist Church in Coral Springs. He is also the godfather of my grandson Micah. He writes a blog on a regular basis. The one I’m going to share was written in March of this year (March 23). I told Vance I was going to be using this blog. The blog’s title: “How the Birthday Cake Ruined the Church.” **(image)**

“A century ago or more, if you wanted a birthday cake, you ground the grain you grew and harvested, collected eggs from your own hen-house, milked the cow, and hoped you still had the ingredients you couldn’t produce, purchased on your last trip to the general store. After mixing the ingredients, yourself, you might have needed to chop some wood to heat the stove to bake the cake.

A half-century ago, to celebrate a birthday, you went to the neighborhood grocer to buy the ingredients you need—flour, sugar, eggs, milk, baking powder, etc. You took those ingredients home, mixed the batter with an electric mixer, and baked a cake in your electric or gas oven.

Then came a simpler way. Rather than buying individual ingredients, cake mixes and canned frosting could be purchased. You still baked the cake yourself, but the process was so much simpler, less time---consuming, and required less knowledge or skill---just dumped the mix in a bowl and follow the directions on the package.

Then came the grocery store bakery. They have always been bakeries, of course. But grocery store bakeries were cheaper and more convenient. Now, instead of baking, you could buy a ready-made beautifully decorated cake, in the color and flavor of your choice, and even have a custom birthday greeting added for no additional charge. No time, effort, or skill required.

But, the problem is, everyone doesn't like the same flavor of cake. Some people are on diets. Some are vegan. Some are lactose intolerant. Some are avoiding gluten. Some have food allergies. Some prefer more basic flavors, while others desire something more exotic. And, aesthetics matter. We don't want to eat something that looks mass-produced. We want a nice presentation. So, we order designer cupcakes, on line, catering to multiple wants and needs, packaged in special boxes, and have them delivered to our office or home.

We've shifted from creators, contributors and cultivators, to consumers (and, sometimes, critics and complainers.)

This scenario is replayed over, and over, and over. We used to make coffee, at home, in a percolator. Now, we order ahead for a Grande soy latte with whipped cream and an extra shot of espresso, hot and ready for pick-up and minutes. We used to wait in line at movie theaters, hoping tickets were available when you got to the window, knowing you might not get great seats. Now we order our movie tickets ahead, selecting from a variety of viewing and listening options, choosing our specific reclining, leather seats, with no waiting at the theater door, and with plenty of time to purchase a much wider variety of beverages and snacks than just basic popcorn and soda.

The list could go on and on.

Notice how we've moved from basic commodities---cake ingredients, coffee beans, general seating---to be served by others, with little-to-no personal effort, and much higher levels of expectation for personalization, specialization and convenience.

I suspect, when we make our own cakes and coffee, we accepted certain imperfections....I think, we used to be generally more accepting, and assumed the burden was on us to make things better if we weren't satisfied.

If the cake didn't turn out right, bake another one. If you don't know how to decorate a cake, ask your neighbor for help. If you don't like chocolate cake, hopefully you'll get vanilla next year. If you made the coffee too strong, add some milk. If you want to get a ticket to the show, get in line earlier next time.

We don't think that way any more. We want it customized. We want it perfect. We want it pretty. We want it easy. We want it special. We want it NOW!

We've become spoiled, critical, demanding, and impatient.

We've become consumers.

As a pastor, I see numerous ways this shift has negatively impacted the Church.

If you follow the same general timeline I shared about birthday cakes, there was once a time church consisted of the many and varied contributions of the members. Repair to the facilities were performed by member craftsmen. Sanctuaries were cleaned and decorated with home-grown flowers collected and arranged, paraments sewn and embroidered, washed and starched, pews polished, holiday decoration made and displayed, all by the members. The music was generally the best efforts of the church's best musicians. Some member typed the bulletin on a typewriter, usually including a few typos. Somebody arrived early to turn on the furnace or open the windows. An usher swept the front steps. Somebody baked the communion bread. Parent and grandparents took turns teaching Sunday School, leading and planning Vacation Bible School, and working in the nursery. Members taught Sunday School classes, and took food to the sick and homebound. Members gathered regularly for home-cooked, churchwide dinners. "Elder" members made the decisions, prayed, and dreamed of starting new ministries and building new buildings.

EVERYONE gave what they could, as the Lord provided. EVERYONE, took turns, doing what needed to be done. EVERYONE did their part. And, when it was necessary, if a need or problem or deficiency became obvious, someone stepped up to do it.

Church was the gathered service, gifted-ness, creativity, and contributions of the members, sometimes as good as the delicious home-baked bread served at communion, and sometimes as terrible as grandma's arthritic attempt to play the piano. Every gift was given and appreciated with love, for what it was---an offering of service to the Lord.

Now, church has become a place to be served. Though we still depend on volunteers, the message from many is, *"Don't ask or expect too much."* The even greater message is, *"I come to church to be served."* I want to sit where I want to sit. I want to sing songs I know and like. I want the volume set according to my tastes. I want to hear messages relevant to my life, that fit neatly into what I already believe. I want to attend when it's convenient. I want the temperature adjusted to my comfort. I want to drop my children off at the nursery, or Sunday School, or VBS, or the youth group, and have others entertain them. I want someone to make sure I am safe. I want lots of programs offered for me and my family, so I can pick and choose what fits into my schedule. I want a good parking space.

Even serving often seems self-serving.

Rather than expecting church to be the place to serve and contribute, many expect church to serve them and contribute to their own needs, wants and desires. If I don't like something, I'll complain, or at least grumble. If I don't like the current sermon series, I'll just stay home. If I don't like the music, I'll come late. If I don't want to give or volunteer, I'll let others take up the slack for me. If I'm not interested, I won't show up. If I hear another church has more to offer my family, without asking so much, I'll just go there instead.

Don't get me wrong. I enjoy cupcakes and lattes. I appreciate convenience. I like to be served. I, too have high standards and expectations. Even as the pastor, I want things at church to be done well.

I'm not questioning our appetite for excellence. I'm challenging our consumeristic expectations and demands. If you want something to be excellent, then YOU make it excellent. And, just because the world is willing to cater to your demands for convenience and customization don't bring that expectation to church.

Church is a place to serve, not to be served.

Church is like a birthday cake, baked from scratch, from pure, fresh ingredients. We are the ingredients---the flour, the sugar, the milk, the eggs---lovingly mixed together and baked by our heavenly maker. The final product might not be everyone's favorite flavor. It might be a little lopsided. The icing might be a little un-even. "*Happy Birthday*" written in frosting, might not be spelled exactly right. But all in all, the ingredients can potentially combine to create a delicious offering for the world. An offering for the world---not us.

Church is a place to serve, not to be served."

Entitlement and meism says I deserve, this is what I want, you owe me. It turns into "What can the church do for me?" and even, "What can God do for me?" Perhaps we replace those questions with a different type of Meism. "What can I do for my fellow believers?" "What can I do for God?"

Newsflash: God has an amazing idea. Church is about Him!